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Special Committee on
decolonization
Meeting (PM)

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NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER CALLS FOR UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE IN EAST TIMOR

Addresses Special Committee on Decolonization As It Hears Petitioners on East Timor Question

Jose Ramos Horta, co-winner of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, this afternoon called for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish an office in East Timor to facilitate dialogue between the Timorese and the Indonesian authorities and to mediate local conflicts.

Addressing the Special Committee on decolonization, the resistance activist -- who was awarded the Prize along with East Timorese Roman Catholic Bishop Ximenes Belo -- also called for a reduction to 1,000 of the number of Indonesian troops in East Timor and their confinement to barracks. In addition, he urged East Timorese resistance fighters to observe a cessation of all armed activities.

Among other petitioners speaking today on the question of East Timor, a representative of Human Rights Watch/ASIA urged the Special Committee to encourage the Indonesian Government to establish an independent truth commission to examine past abuses in the Territory. Such a commission should also act to cease the creation of militias and other quasi-military institutions which only served to exacerbate the human rights situation in East Timor, she said.

The Special Committee heard a call for an East Timorese version of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) by a representative of the Free East Timor Japan Coalition. He said the United Nations must establish a transitional authority on East Timor, and urged the Committee to support efforts aimed at rebuilding indigenous civil society and institutions pending an internationally monitored electoral process.

Representatives of several organizations appealed for reconciliation among the different political groups in East Timor. A representative of Timorese Youth for Reconciliation said such reconciliation should be given high priority. East Timorese youth wanted to move forward; they were tired of standing still, he said.

The Committee heard statements by representatives of the following organizations: the Seeds of Hope East Timor Ploughshares Group; the Hobart East Timor Committee; the National Council of Maubere Resistance; the International Platform of Jurists for East Timor; Fretilin International; the Auckland East Timor Independence Committee; the Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor; the Timor Foundation for Reconciliation and Development; the Timorese Cultural Group; the Movement of Support to the Intra-Timorese Dialogue; and the Timorese Cultural and Ethnic Research Centre in Australia. The representative of Indonesia spoke on a point of order.

The Special Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. tomorrow, 17 June, to continue hearing petitioners on the question of East Timor.

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Special Committee Work Programme

The Special Committee on decolonization met this afternoon to continue its consideration of the question of East Timor. It was expected to hear a number of petitioners on the issue,

including a joint recipient of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, Jose Ramos Horta.

Statements

ANGIE ZELTER, of the United Kingdom-based Seeds of Hope East Timor Ploughshares Group, said that with a new Government in power in Britain, there was now a chance that, with United Nations leadership, that Government would support a proper process of decolonization for East Timor and the removal of Indonesians from the Territory.

She said Indonesian armed forces violated East Timor's right to selfdetermination and continued their illegal occupation of the Territory, contrary to United Nations resolutions. Indonesia was carrying out horrifying acts of aggression and genocide in violation of the Nuremberg Principles and the Geneva Conventions. British citizens were deeply ashamed at the support that previous British Governments gave to Indonesian troops, selling weapons to Indonesia and pretending not to know the scale of the killings in East Timor during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Special Committee was urged to do all in its power to help advance the decolonization process in East Timor and bring to an end its disgraceful and tragic occupation.

JOSE RAMOS HORTA, co-winner of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, called for a reduction to 1,000 the number of Indonesian troops in East Timor and their confinement to barracks, and urged East Timorese resistance fighters to observe a cessation of all armed activities. He said a protection zone should be created in an agreed region of the Territory, where the armed resistance forces and their families could assemble under international humanitarian protection. Prisoners should be released and torture ended.

He said an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should be established in East Timor, with a mandate modelled after a similar office in Colombia and the confidentiality rules of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). That office could serve as a useful bridge for communication between the local people and the authorities, facilitate dialogue and mediate local conflicts. It should also provide training in international human rights and humanitarian law for law-enforcement agents, the armed forces, the police and civil society.

He urged the parties concerned to work in good faith with the SecretaryGeneral to find a satisfactory formula for resolving the East Timor conflict. Noting the forthcoming meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia, he said the Secretary-General had, during his six months in office, given ample evidence of his firm commitment to work with objectivity, impartiality, creativity and determination to bring about a resolution of the conflict.

The East Timorese should be given the right to govern their own country, he said. The United Nations, Portugal, Indonesia, Australia, United States, Japan and East Timorese political leaders must share responsibility for the tragedy that had affected the people of the Territory. "The people of East Timor were and are still the victims of our collective irresponsibility, of the errors of judgement of some, and the indifference of too many", he said. It served no purpose to put the blame on one side or the other.

GEOFFREY C. GUNN, of the Free East Timor Japan Coalition and a professor of international relations, urged the Special Committee to take an active and interventionist approach to the question of East Timor. It would be a travesty of truth and law if the Committee was to accept the arguments of the Indonesian Government. The Committee should set in motion machinery to ascertain the wishes of the East Timorese for their political future. The United Nations should be moving in the direction of an East Timorese version of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to tailor a future United Nations presence inside occupied East Timor to match that country's languages and traditions.

Stressing that the United Nations must establish a transitional authority on East Timor, he urged the Committee to lend its authority to an international effort, also involving non-governmental organizations, to rebuild indigenous civil society and institutions, pending an internationally monitored electoral process. He also called for the stationing in East Timor of the permanent presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR), not just in Jakarta, as part of a larger and imaginative peace package.

He affirmed Japanese interest in a solution to the problem of East Timor. Japan did not recognize Indonesian claims to East Timor and would lend its good offices and experience towards a solution of the problem. He recommended a body of independent scholarship on East Timor to the Committee, so that it would not have to "swallow the half-truths and fabrications emanating from the officialized Indonesian media on East Timor". Those who had visited East Timor could no longer be duped by the Indonesian public relations machinery.

CONSTANCIO PINTO, of the National Council of Maubere Resistance, said he was Timorese, a former political prisoner and the organizer of a peaceful demonstration in November 1991 in which 271 people were killed by the Indonesian Army. His organization envisioned an independent and democratic East Timor, based on the rule of law and emanating from the will of the people through free elections. The question of self-determination had brought his organization and others to the Committee each year, to give that body firsthand accounts of the conflict in East Timor. Despite the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to two East Timorese, the frequency of human rights violations in the Territory had increased. Since then, hundreds of people had been arrested, tortured and disappeared.

He said the reality of torture in East Timor was that political prisoners were punched repeatedly, men's genital organs were electrocuted, fingernails pulled out, bodies burnt with cigarette butts, faces sliced with razor blades, and women raped in front of their husbands, children, relatives and friends. The Indonesian Army continued its retaliation against civilians. Torture or ill-treatment of political prisoners in East Timor in both police and military custody was routine. Retaliatory attacks such as those on 29 May in Dili and Lospalos were not isolated; they had occurred since the Indonesian invasion. He urged the United Nations to send human rights observers to East Timor without delay, including special rapporteurs. Indonesia's human rights abuses would end with a political settlement that took into account the right of the East Timorese to self-determination.

ELIZABETH SISSONS, of the Hobart East Timor Committee, drew attention to discrimination being perpetuated by Indonesia on the grounds of race, gender and creed. Indonesia was using rape as a weapon of occupation. By not condemning such actions of the Indonesian occupying forces, the international community had implicitly endorsed them. Indonesia was also engaged in serious discrimination against the people of East Timor on religious grounds, with animists as the victims. She called for international condemnation of the discriminatory practices by Indonesia.

JENNIFER COON, of the International Platform of Jurists for East Timor, expressed concern about the detention of an East Timorese labour leader despite his severe illness. Indonesia was holding many in prison. Its continuing violation of human rights contradicted its claim that the people of East Timor had been happily integrated into Indonesian society. The people were being marginalized and denied employment opportunities, as well as the sovereignty over their natural resources. She called for an international arms embargo against Indonesia, noting such a measure had helped end the apartheid regime in South Africa.

MARI ALKATIRI, of Fretilin International, said that all organizations resisting East Timor's illegal occupation by Indonesia were willing to find mechanisms to re-establish international law there. That was an important condition for the Maubere people of East Timor to freely exercise the right to self-determination and independence. The occupation costs of East Timor included a death toll of more than 200,000, as well as 20,000 exiled, thousands of orphans, innumerable rapes, tortures, summary executions, persecution and imprisonment without trial. For 23 years, there had been a procession of violence and violations against the defenceless East Timorese population. Political costs included an ongoing conflict which had the potential to destabilize the region. Legal costs included the ongoing violation of international law, which had taken alarming proportions as a deliberate policy of genocide against the East Timorese people.

He said that General Assembly and Security Council resolutions adopted since 1975 clearly

stated that East Timor had not yet exercised its right to self-determination and independence. Both bodies had demanded the withdrawal of Indonesian forces. "The international community is awakening after a long sleep, induced by the virus of indifference and the syndrome of Indonesian annexation's irreversibility." There was need for an international criminal court for East Timor. He looked forward to constructive dialogue with Jakarta to ensure that the Secretary-General achieved success in eliminating all colonial issues from the United Nations agenda by the year 2000.

ALYN WARE, of the Auckland East Timor Independence Committee, recalled the extreme response by the Indonesian Government to a recent demonstration by students. It had been an example of the harsh treatment of young people who opposed Indonesian Government rule. The New Zealand Government had changed its policy on East Timor, encouraging tripartite talks, supporting a United Nations-sponsored referendum, recognizing East Timor's right to selfdetermination and calling for the withdrawal of troops.

He stressed the importance of the Nobel Peace Prize to East Timorese. It was hoped that the Committee's deliberations would assist in promoting progress on the issue in the interest of the East Timorese people.

AUGUSTO MITCLAT, of the Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor, expressed the hope that the current session of the Special Committee would lead to selfdetermination for the people of East Timor. Events in the region, such as Burma's admission into the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), could impede that goal. The ASEAN action strengthened Indonesian control of East Timor. At a meeting with their European Union counterparts last February, ASEAN Foreign Ministers had successfully argued in support of Indonesia's position that discussion of the East Timorese issue would be extraneous.

MARTY MULIANA NATALEGAWA (Indonesia), speaking on a point of order, said petitioner's references to ASEAN should not be allowed.

UTULA U. SAMANA (Papua New Guinea), Special Committee Chairman, urged the petitioner to stick to the issue.

Mr. MITCLAT said his organization was a regional body, hence his references to ASEAN. The policies of ASEAN presented enormous implications for the people of East Timor. If the United Nations did not act decisively on the issue, the people would take matters into their own hands and the United Nations would face a far more intractable situation. He urged the Organization to implement all its resolutions on East Timor.

SIDNEY JONES, of Human Rights Watch/ASIA, said no serious efforts had been made by Indonesia to account for the past abuses in East Timor. Anger against the Indonesian Government was deep-seated and would not go away. Indonesia had long employed divide-and-rule tactics as a security measure in the Territory, apparently in the belief that to pit one group against another would weaken resistance to its rule.

She expressed support for a 1997 resolution by the Commission for Human Rights expressing concern about continuing reports of violations in East Timor, as well as at the lack of compliance made by Indonesian authorities with commitments undertaken at previous sessions of the Commission. The Special Committee should encourage the Indonesian Government to establish an independent truth commission to examine past abuses in the Territory and to cease the practice of creating militias and other quasi-military institutions, which only served to exacerbate the human rights situation.

ABILIO ARAUJO, of the Timor Foundation for Reconciliation and Development, said the conflict was a colonial problem, and new approaches must be adopted to resolve it. The East Timorese people wanted to preserve their political space. There was ground for consensus among historical leaders which would lead to a resolution of the conflict.

He called for respect of the cultural identity of the people, promotion of human rights and sustainable growth, and welcomed the forthcoming talks between Portuguese and Indonesian Foreign Ministers in New York. Creative new ideas should be put forward. The Timor foundation

would continue to promote progress in the Territory and appealed to all parties to end the use of violence.

ROGERIO PEREIRA, coordinator of Timorese Youth for Reconciliation, said the Committee had played a key role in pushing forward the question of the sovereignty of East Timor. The majority of young Timorese were optimistic about their future. The facts spoke for themselves in East Timor. Portugal had run away from its responsibility to ensure a normal decolonization process there. Reconciliation should be given high priority. There was need for more education, development and prosperity. East Timorese youth wanted to move forward; they were tired of standing still. The Portuguese had left the country backward.

He said there were many social problems that had been created by the Timorese political parties. Dialogue should be continued and agreement reached on the issue of sovereignty.

INOCENCIA XIMENES NEVES, of the Timorese Cultural Group, said the invasion of East Timor had been the outcome of Timorese abandonment of their responsibility and a shirking of the administering Power's responsibility. When the intervention by Indonesia occurred, she had abandoned her native land, but she had a desire to return home one day, to play a part in the development of the Timorese people and culture. Her organization aimed at keeping Timorese culture alive through dance and other cultural activities. Its activities included traditional dances and songs, which were practised in Portugal to keep Timorese culture alive.

She said that one result of past meetings aimed at promoting reconciliation had been an exchange between Timorese in East Timor and those abroad. On a recent return to the Territory, she had seen much prosperity. Current development had been made possible by the growth in the economic sector, as well as by the reduction in illiteracy. She appealed to the Secretary-General to find a solution to the East Timorese issue; her organization would continue to support the reconciliation process.

ANTONIO MARIA ARAUJO, of the Movement of Support to the Intra-Timorese Dialogue, said the parties must accept blame for the mistakes of the past while searching for a resolution of the problem. East Timorese were now aware that they should also contribute to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, while not seeking to interfere with the talks between Portugal and Indonesia. East Timorese with opposing views had met overseas in an effort to contribute to that effort. International support was important but proposals must meet with the wishes of the people.

MARIA LOURDES SOARES, of the Timorese Cultural and Ethnic Research Centre in Australia, said there was an urgent need for concerted effort to safeguard the cultural heritage of the East Timorese people. In a recent visit to the Territory, she discovered that there had been some improvements, but there was still need for improved infrastructure. East Timorese representatives had been tireless in their search for a resolution of the conflict. There was now a need for alternatives, which could be found in proposals put forward at reconciliation meetings. The reconciliation process had brought home the fact that all was not lost, she said. That process should be viewed as complementary to the diplomatic efforts involving Portugal, Indonesia and the United Nations. It was the responsibility of the East Timorese to find the path to resolution of the conflict, while supporting those diplomatic efforts.

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